

Room 56-423

September 17, 1969

*Published
by NY Times
around
Sept. 25, 1969*

To the Editor:
The New York Times
229 West 43rd Street
New York, New York,

Dear sir:

The triviality of the scientific returns from the man-on-the-moon program is finally becoming evident even to those -- mostly non-scientists -- who had been misled by publicity and by the play on popular imagination indulged in by Government and the mass media.

The moon rock samples, about which full columns of news are released by NASA, cannot even answer the few questions some geologists are interested in solving.

It is important that this be made clear because of the current discussion about big versus small Mars-landing programs -- probably 3 billions a year for 50 years or 10 billions a year for 15 years. This at a time when the Institute of General Medical Sciences of the NIH has announced substantial cuts in new health-related research projects, a news that has received much less prominence than any one of the rock-news from NASA.

Even apart from the social benefits that American health research has been in the habit of delivering, such as polio, measles, and flu vaccines and hundred other medical advances, almost any one of the hundreds of projects that the National Institutes of Health cannot fund has intrinsic scientific interest at least as great as a trip to the moon -- in terms of the number of intelligently concerned people and addition to human knowledge.

Technology, however sophisticated, is not science unless its goal is knowledge. Intellectual priorities are at least as important for human culture as socio-economic priorities, and both are being distorted by the space program.

It is time the American people be told frankly that the present space program is technically impressive, scientifically trivial, culturally misguided, and socially preposterous.

S. E. Luria, M.D.
Sedgwick Professor of Biology

The writer is a member of the National Academy of Sciences, the American Philosophical Society, and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.